

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI  
EASTERN DIVISION**

ROBERT J. LEVINS,	)	
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
v.	)	Case No. 4:15-CV-981 NAB
	)	
CAROLYN W. COLVIN,	)	
Acting Commissioner of Social Security,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	

**MEMORANDUM AND ORDER**

This matter is before the court on Plaintiff’s Motion for Attorney’s Fees Under the Equal Access to Justice Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2412 (“EAJA”). [Doc. 16.] Plaintiff requests attorney’s fees in the amount of \$2,886.17, at the rate of \$189.88 per hour for 15.2 hours of attorney work. Plaintiff also requests reimbursement of \$400.00 for the filing fee. Defendant Carolyn Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, does not object to Plaintiff’s request for attorney’s fees and filing fee, nor the amount requested. [Doc. 17.] Based on the following, the Court will award Plaintiff attorney’s fees in the amount of \$2,886.17 for attorney’s fees and \$400.00 for reimbursement of the filing fee.

**I. Factual and Procedural Background**

Plaintiff Robert J. Levins filed this action, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) for judicial review of the final decision of Defendant denying Plaintiff’s application for disability insurance benefits under the Social Security Act. [Doc. 1.] On November 30, 2015, the Court issued an Order of Reversal and Remand and a Judgment in favor of Plaintiff pursuant to sentence four of

42 U.S.C. § 405(g). [Docs. 14, 15.] Plaintiff filed a motion for attorney's fees under the EAJA on February 8, 2016. [Doc. 16.] Defendant filed a response on February 22, 2016. [Doc. 17.]

## **II. Standard of Review**

“A court shall award to a prevailing party. . . fees and other expenses . . . incurred by that party in any civil action (other than cases sounding in tort), including proceedings for judicial review of agency action, brought by or against the United States in any court having jurisdiction of that action, unless the court finds that the position of the United States was substantially justified or that special circumstances make an award unjust.” 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(1)(A).

A party seeking an award of fees and other expenses must (1) submit to the court an application for fees and other expenses which shows that the party is a prevailing party and eligible to receive an award; (2) provide the amount sought, including an itemized statement from any attorney or expert witness representing or appearing on behalf of the party stating the actual time expended and the rate at which fees and other expenses were computed; (3) allege that the position of the United States was not substantially justified, and (4) make the application within thirty days of final judgment of the action. 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(1)(B). The determination of whether the position of the United States was substantially justified shall be determined on the basis of the record made in the action for which the fees are sought. *Id.* “In sentence four [remand] cases, the filing period begins after the final judgment (“affirming, modifying, or reversing”) is entered by the Court and the appeal period has run so that the judgment is no longer appealable.” *Melkonyan v. Sullivan*, 501 U.S. 89, 102 (1991) (citing 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(2)(G) (“Final judgment” means a judgment that is final and not appealable.”)).

“It is well-settled that in order to be a prevailing party for EAJA purposes, plaintiff must have received some, but not necessarily all, of the benefits originally sought in his action.”

*Stanfield v. Apfel*, 985 F.Supp. 927, 929 (E.D. Mo. 1997) (citing *Swedberg v. Bowen*, 804 F.2d 432, 434 (8th Cir.1986)). Obtaining a sentence four judgment reversing the Secretary's denial of benefits is sufficient to confer prevailing party status. *Shalala v. Schaefer*, 509 U.S. 292, 302 (1993).

### **III. Discussion**

In this action, the Court finds that Plaintiff has demonstrated that an award of attorney's fees under the EAJA is appropriate in this matter. First, Plaintiff is a prevailing party in this action, because he has obtained a reversal of the Commissioner's denial of his application for benefits. [Doc. 15.]

Second, Plaintiff's application for attorney's fees is reasonable. Plaintiff requests attorney's fees in the amount of \$2,886.17 at the rate of \$189.88 per hour for 15.2 hours of attorney work. Plaintiff includes an itemized statement from his attorneys stating the actual time expended and the rate at which the attorney's fees were computed. Therefore, the Court will award Plaintiff attorney's fees for 15.2 hours of attorney work.

The EAJA sets a statutory limit on the amount of fees awarded to counsel at \$125.00 per hour, "unless the court determines that an increase in the cost of living or a special factor, such as the limited availability of qualified attorneys for the proceedings involved, justifies a higher fee." 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(2)(A)(ii). "In determining a reasonable attorney's fee, the court will in each case consider the following factors: time and labor required; the difficulty of questions involved; the skill required to handle the problems presented; the attorney's experience, ability, and reputation; the benefits resulting to the client from the services; the customary fee for similar services; the contingency or certainty of compensation; the results obtained; and the amount involved." *Richardson-Ward v. Astrue*, 2009 WL1616701, No. 4:07-CV-1301 JCH at \*1 (E.D.

Mo. June 9, 2009). “The decision to increase the hourly rate is at the discretion of the district court.” *Id.* at \*2. “Where, as here, an EAJA petitioner presents uncontested proof of an increase in the cost of living sufficient to justify hourly attorney's fees of more than [\$125.00] per hour, enhanced fees should be awarded.” *Johnson v. Sullivan*, 919 F.2d 503, 505 (8th Cir. 1990).

Plaintiff's counsel cited evidence from the U.S. Department of Labor, explaining the change in the cost of living from 1996 when the \$125.00 hourly limitation became effective until 2015. Defendant does not contest the hourly rate, the total fee request, nor the number of hours itemized in the invoice. Upon consideration of these facts, the Court finds that the hourly rate, number of hours expended, and a total fee award of \$2,886.17 is reasonable. As alleged by Plaintiff, the Court finds that the Defendant's position was not substantially justified. Plaintiff's application for fees was timely filed. Therefore, the Court will award Plaintiff \$2,886.17 in attorney's fees at the rate of \$189.88 per hour for 15.2 hours of attorney work.

Plaintiff also seeks reimbursement of the filing fee in the amount of \$400.00. Defendant does not contest the award of \$400.00 to the Plaintiff. “A judgment for costs when taxed against the United States shall, in an amount established by statute, court rule, or order, be limited to reimbursing in whole or in part the prevailing party for the costs incurred by such party in the litigation. 28 U.S.C. § 2412(a)(1). Based on the foregoing, the Court will award Plaintiff costs in the amount of \$400.00 for reimbursement of the filing fee.

Accordingly,

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that Plaintiff's Motion for Attorney's Fees is **GRANTED**.

[Doc. 16.]

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that Defendant Commissioner of Social Security shall remit to Plaintiff Robert J. Levins attorney's fees in the amount of \$2,886.17, subject to any pre-

existing debt that the Plaintiff owes the United States at the address provided by his attorney,  
1285 Fern Ridge Parkway, Suite 120, St. Louis, MO 63141.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that costs in the amount of \$400.00 shall be remitted to  
Plaintiff at the address listed above to be paid from the Judgment Fund administered by the  
United States Treasury.

Dated this 25th day of February, 2016.

/s/ Nannette A. Baker  
NANNETTE A. BAKER  
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE